

॥हस्तामलकीयम्॥

HASTAMALAKIYAM

of

Hastamalaka, disciple of Sri Sankara Bhagavatpada

(Essence of Vedanta in twelve verses)

(Text in Devanagari script with translation and explanatory notes based on the Bhashya of Sri Sankara)

by

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Hastamalakiyam

Introduction

It is well known that Sri Sankaracharya had four disciples, one of whom was named Hastamalaka. This was not his original name, but was given to him by the Acharya. How he became a disciple of Sri Sankara is described beautifully in the work entitled 'Sankara-Digvijaya' by Swami Vidyananya. It is said therein that during his stay at the famous temple at Mookambika the Acharya happened to visit a nearby village named Sri Bali. In that village there was a Brahmana by name Prabhakara who was noted for his learning and the regular performance of the rites enjoined by the Vedas. Though he was quite wealthy and was respected by all, he was not happy because his only son was dumb and behaved like a congenital idiot. On hearing that the great Acharya had come to his village, he decided to take his son to the Acharya in the hope that the latter's blessing would cure his child and make him a normal, intelligent boy. He went to the Acharya and prostrated before him and asked his son to do the same. The boy prostrated, but did not get up for quite a long time. The Acharya, in his unbounded compassion, lifted up the boy. The father then told the Acharya, "O Sir, this boy is now seven years old, but his mind is totally undeveloped. He has not learnt even the alphabets, not to speak of the Vedas. Boys of his age come and call him to join them in play, but he does

not respond. If they beat him he remains unaffected. Sometimes he takes some food, but sometimes he does not eat at all. I have completely failed in my efforts to teach him”. When the father had said this, the Acharya asked the boy “Who are you? Why are you behaving in this strange manner, as if you are an inert thing?” To this the boy replied, “I am certainly not an inert thing. Even an inert thing becomes sentient in my presence. I am of the nature of infinite Bliss, free from the six waves (hunger, thirst, grief, delusion, old age and death) and the six stages (birth, existence, growth, change, decay and destruction)”. The boy then expounded the gist of all the Upanishads in twelve verses, which became famous under the name ‘Hastamalakiyam’. As the knowledge of the Atman was as clear to him as an amalaka fruit in one’s palm, the name “Hastamalaka” was given to him. The Acharya then told the father of the boy “This apparently dumb son of yours knows the truth of the Atman by virtue of his practices in past lives. He is totally free from all attachment and any sense of I-ness with regard to the body. Let this boy come with me”. So saying, the Acharya took the boy along with him as his disciple.

Subsequently, while explaining to his other disciples how this boy had attained Self-knowledge even at this very young age, Sri Sankara says, “One day, when he was a two-year old child, his mother had taken him along with her when she went to the river for her bath. She left the child on the bank under the care of a Jnani who happened to be sitting there. The child accidentally fell into the water when the Jnani was deep in meditation. When the mother came back after her bath she was shocked to find that the child was dead and she began to cry. Moved by pity for her the Jnani, by virtue of his Yogic power, entered the body of the child, casting off his own mortal coil. The child thus became a realized soul.

Sri Sankara was so impressed by the profundity of these twelve verses that he himself wrote an elaborate commentary on them. In this commentary Sri Sankara refers to Hastamalaka, his own disciple, as the ‘Acharya’. This indicates, not only the greatness of Hastamalaka’s verses, but also the magnanimity of the Guru, Sri Sankara. The

explanation of these twelve verses, given in the following paragraphs, is based on Sri Sankara's commentary.

Hastamalakiyam

Sri Sankara , at the commencement of his commentary on Hastamalakiyam, says that the desire of every living being on this earth is to enjoy happiness all the time and to be always free from sorrow. The activities of all creatures are directed towards achieving these two objectives. But a rare human being, who has accumulated an abundant store of punya in past lives, realizes that all happiness derived from sense-objects is transitory and is bound to be followed by sorrow. As a result, he develops total detachment towards all sense pleasures and strives to bring an end to Samsara, the continuous cycle of birth and death. Since ignorance of one's Self (Atma) is the root cause of Samsara and only Self-knowledge can put an end to Samsara, Hastamalaka, referred to here by Sri Sankara as the 'Acharya', teaches Self-knowledge in the following twelve verses.

निमित्तं मनश्चक्षुरादिप्रवृत्तौ

निरस्ताखिलोपाधिराकाशकल्पः।

रविलोकचेष्टानिमित्तं यथा यः

स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥१

1. I am the Atma (Self) which is of the nature of eternal Consciousness and which is the cause of the functioning of the mind, eye and all other organs, in the same way as the sun is the cause of the activities of all beings on this earth. But when not associated with the limiting adjuncts (in the form of the body, mind and sense-organs), I, (Self) am like space.

Eternal Consciousness--- The Self (Atma) is Pure Consciousness which is present without any change in all the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. It is because of

this eternal Consciousness that the sense organs appear sentient and are able to reveal their respective objects such as form, sound, smell, etc, in the waking state. In dream the sense organs are dormant, but the mind projects various objects and experiences them in the light of this same eternal Consciousness. In deep sleep the mind is also dormant, but the Self, which is pure Consciousness, exists without any change. This is proved by the fact that one remembers, on waking up, that one slept happily and did not know anything. Only what has been experienced previously by a person can be subsequently remembered by him. Therefore it is clear that the Self existed during deep sleep also.

Cause of the activities of the mind, etc.—The mind and all the organs are insentient. It is only by the light of the pure Consciousness which is reflected in the mind, that the mind acquires sentiency. This can be compared to a mirror on which the reflection of the sun falls. If the mirror, with the reflection of the sun on it, is turned towards a dark room, the room becomes lighted. It would then appear as if the light belongs to the mirror itself. In the same way, the mind, which receives the reflection of the consciousness of the Self, appears as if it is itself conscious. The eye and all other organs, which receive the reflection of consciousness from the mind, also appear, in turn, to have consciousness. It is because of this that it is said in this verse that the Self is the cause of the activities of the mind and organs. But the Self is actionless. It neither acts, nor does it prompt the mind and organs to act. The Self is the cause only in the sense that in its mere presence the mind and organs act. This is explained by the analogy of the sun being considered as the cause of the activities of all beings. When the sun rises, everyone begins his work in its light, but the sun does not make anyone act in any particular manner. The sun merely provides the light for all activity. What kind of activity a person engages in depends on himself alone. The sun is not at all involved in it. The sun neither benefits nor suffers because of the activities of any person. In the same way, the Self gives the mind and organs sentiency, which makes them capable of performing action, but the Self does not make any one act in any particular

manner. The Self is neither benefited by the virtuous actions of any person, nor is it adversely affected by any evil deeds of any one.

When not associated with the limiting adjuncts the Self is like space-

Even the statement that the Self is the cause of the activities of the mind and organs is made only from the empirical (*vyaavahaarika*) standpoint. From the standpoint of ultimate truth (*paaramaarthika*) the Self has no connection whatever with the limiting adjuncts (called *upadhi*) in the form of the body, mind and organs. The method adopted in Vedanta to impart the knowledge of Brahman is known as the method of superimposition (*adhyaropa*) and subsequent denial (*apavaada*). The Self cannot be directly described by words because it has no quality, activity or relationship with anything else. A substance which has a quality, such as redness, bigness, etc, can be described by reference to that quality. A person who performs a particular activity such as cooking can be described by reference to that activity, as a cook, etc. A stranger can be identified by reference to his relationship with a known person. Because of the absence of any of these qualities the Self cannot be described at all by any words. The method of superimposition and subsequent denial has therefore to be resorted to. The Self appears, because of our ignorance of its real nature, to be limited by the body, mind and organs. On the basis of this apparent limitation it was first said that the Self is the cause of the activities of the mind and organs. But from the point of view of ultimate reality, since the Self alone is real in the absolute sense, it can have no association with the mind, etc, which are not real from the absolute point of view, just as an object experienced in dream cannot have any association with an object known in the waking state. Space, which is infinite, is referred to as pot-space, room-space, etc, when it is looked upon as limited by a pot, a room, etc, but these do not really limit space. In the same way the Self, which is pure consciousness, is all-pervading and is not limited by the body, mind, etc. It is only because of our ignorance of its real nature that we consider the Self as limited and separate in each body.

By this comparison with space it is also shown that the Self is unattached and is not affected by the pleasures and pains experienced by the body and mind, in the same way as space is not destroyed or affected by the destruction of the pot or by any damage to it.

Are the mind, eye and other organs not capable of functioning on their own, without the help of the Self? What is meant by the statement that the Self is of the nature of eternal consciousness? These questions are answered in the verse 2.

यमग्न्युष्णवन्नित्यबोधस्वरूपं

मनश्चक्षुरादीन्यबोधात्मकानि।

प्रवर्तन्त आश्रित्य निष्कम्पमेकं

स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥२

2. I am the Self which is of the nature of eternal consciousness, which is changeless and one only (non-dual), whose very nature is eternal consciousness, in the same manner as heat is the very nature of fire, and depending on which the mind, eye and other organs, which are all insentient, function.

Changeless and non-dual--- The one, non-dual Self dwells in all bodies. It is ever the same and is not subject to any change whatsoever.

Heat is the very nature of fire. Heat and fire are inseparable. Heat is not an attribute of fire. An attribute is a quality which can be found in more than one substance. For example, colour is an attribute, because it can be found in many different flowers and even in other substances. But heat can never be seen separately from fire. In the same way, consciousness does not exist anywhere other than in the Self. Consciousness is therefore the very nature of the Self and not an attribute.

The mind, eye and other organs are all insentient and are therefore incapable of functioning on their own. It is only because of the reflection of the Self, which is pure consciousness, in the mind, that the mind appears to be conscious, just as the moon appears to be bright only because of the reflection of the sun's light on it. All the organs function only because they are enlivened by the Self.

Now a doubt arises. It has been said in the preceding verse that the same Self dwells in all bodies. If this is so, then, when one person is happy all others should also be happy and when one is suffering all others should also suffer. But this is not the case. So the Self in each body must be different. This doubt is answered in the following verse.

मुखाभासको दर्पणो दृश्यमानो
मुखत्वात् पृथक्त्वेन नैवास्ति वस्तु।
चिदाभासको धीषु जीवोऽपि तद्वत्
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥३

3. The reflection of a face in a mirror has no real existence apart from the reflected face. So also, the Jiva, who is only the reflection of the Self or Pure Consciousness in the intellect (or mind) has really no separate existence apart from the Self. That Self, which is of the nature of eternal consciousness, I am.

When one face is reflected in a number of mirrors the reflections may be of different shapes and sizes, according as the mirror is plain or convex or concave. The reflection in a particular mirror shakes if that mirror shakes. The reflection is hazy if the mirror is not clean. But all these differences in the various reflections do not at all affect the face that is reflected. In the same manner the Jivas or the individual souls which are only reflections of the same Self in different minds have different characteristics, depending on the nature of each mind, but the Self which is the original does not at all take on the characteristics of the minds, but remains ever the same. The Jiva, who is also in reality Pure Consciousness and therefore eternal and infinite, wrongly identifies himself with the particular mind in which he is reflected and with the physical body associated with that mind. Consequently, he looks upon himself as a limited individual and attributes to himself the joys and sorrows, hunger and thirst and old age and death, which all pertain only to the body and mind. The aim of all the Upanishads is to remove this wrong identification.

Now another doubt arises. If the Atma is not affected by what happens to the body, mind, etc, then it means that there is no bondage at all. If so, what is the need for the Upanishads teaching about the means of removal of bondage? This doubt is answered in the next verse.

यथा दर्पणाभाव आभासहानौ
मुखं विद्यते कल्पनाहीनमेकम्।
तथा धीवियोगे निराभासको यः
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥४

4. Just as when the mirror is removed the reflection of the face ceases to exist and the face alone remains without any false appearances in the form of reflections, so also, when the mind (the reflecting medium) ceases to exist, the Atma is free from all wrong notions caused by the reflection.

The Jiva is the reflection of Brahman-Atman (Self) in the mind. Just as the reflection of a face in a mirror is not real and has no existence apart from the face itself, the Jiva has no reality apart from Brahman whose reflection the Jiva is. But because of ignorance of his real nature, namely that he is in reality none other than Brahman, the Jiva identifies himself with the body-mind complex. It is this identification which is the cause of all suffering. When, as a result of the realisation of his real nature as Brahman, the identification with the body-mind complex comes to an end, all sufferings cease. This realisation of one's real nature and the cessation of identification with the body-mind complex is what is spoken of as 'the mind ceasing to exist'. The cessation of the mind thus means only the loss of the mind in its present form with its accumulated Vasanas or impressions left by past actions and thoughts, which are the cause of likes and dislikes and all their disastrous consequences. When these Vasanas are eliminated, the mind becomes pure and makes the Jiva capable of realizing his real nature. He then dissociates himself completely from the body and the mind and is no more affected by what happens to them. This is the state of Jivanmukti or liberation even while living.

Some (such as the Charvakas and Buddhists) consider the mind itself to be the Self or Atma. This view is refuted in the next verse.

मनश्चक्षुरादेर्वियुक्तः स्वयं यो

मनश्चक्षुरादेर्मनश्चक्षुरादिः।

मनश्चक्षुरादेरगम्यस्वरूपः

स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥५

5. I am that Self which is of the nature of eternal consciousness, which is different from the mind, eye and other organs, but is itself the mind of the mind, the eye of the eye, the ear of the ear and so on. It is however inaccessible to the mind and sense-organs.

The Self is different from the mind and organs, that is to say, from the gross and subtle bodies. The external objects are experienced by the mind through the sense organs. The mind and the sense organs are clearly seen to be different from the experienced objects. By the same reasoning, the Self which illumines the mind and the organs must necessarily be different from them.

It is only by the light of the Consciousness that is the Self that the mind and organs, which are themselves insentient, perform their functions of thinking, seeing, hearing and so on. This is why it is said in this verse that the Self is the mind of the mind, eye of the eye and so on. This is based on the Kenopanishad which says:--

"He (the Self) is the ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of speech, the vital air of the vital air and the eye of the eye" (1.2).

The mind and the organs of sense can experience only external objects. They cannot know the Self. The mind has by itself no consciousness, but appears to be conscious only because of the reflection of the consciousness of the Self on it. The sense organs also derive their apparent sentiency only from this reflected consciousness. This being so, it is obvious that the mind and organs cannot know the Self.

Now the question arises: if the Self cannot be known by the mind and the senses, how can it be realized at all? The answer is given in verse 6.

य एको विभाति स्वतः शुद्धचेताः

प्रकाशस्वरूपोऽपि नानेव धीषु।

शरावोदकस्थो यथा भानुरेकः

स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥६

6. The Self, being self-luminous, shines by itself to those whose minds have become absolutely pure. Though only one, the Self appears as many and different in different intellects, in the same way as the sun, though only one, appears as many when reflected in different pots of water. I am that Self which is of the nature of eternal consciousness.

The Self is ever the subject and cannot therefore become an object to be experienced by the sense organs. When the senses are completely withdrawn from external objects and the mind is concentrated on the Self, the Self is realized. The Kathopanishad says (II.i.1) :-- The Lord made the senses outgoing. Therefore they can know only external objects and not the inner Self. A rare discriminating individual, desiring immortality, turns his eyes (i.e. all the sense organs) away from external objects and sees the indwelling Self.

When the mind becomes pure, that is to say, totally free from attachment and aversion, the Self shines by itself. Sri Sankara says in his commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 4.4.20 that 'attainment of knowledge of Brahman' (or the Self) means only the cessation of identification with external things (such as the body, mind, possessions, relatives and so on). Identity with Brahman is not some thing that requires to be newly established, because it is always there. Everyone is in reality always identical with Brahman, but wrongly considers himself to be different because of beginningless Avidya or ignorance of one's real nature. Therefore the scriptures do not enjoin that identity with Brahman should be established, but only that the false identification with things other than Brahman should be given up. When the identification with other things ceases, the

identity with one's own Self, which is natural, automatically prevails. This is what is meant by the statement in the present verse that the Self shines by itself to those whose mind has become pure.

The Self (also spoken of as Atma or Brahman) is only one, but it appears as many because of the limiting adjunct (upadhi) in the form of the body and mind. The Self reflected in the mind is the Jiva or individual soul and, since the minds are different and many, the Jivas also appear to be many and different from one another. This is comparable to the many reflections of the one sun in the water in different containers.

How does the one Self illumine all intellects simultaneously? This doubt is answered in verse 7.

यथानेकचक्षुःप्रकाशो रविर्न
क्रमेण प्रकाशीकरोति प्रकाश्यम्।
अनेका धियो यस्तथैकप्रबोधः
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥७

7. Just as the sun who gives light to all eyes does not reveal the illumined objects by turns to one person after another (but all eyes are able to see at the same time), so also the Self which is only one gives consciousness to all intellects simultaneously.

The doubt raised was how, if there is only one Self (Atma), it can illumine all intellects at the same time. This doubt has already been answered by the analogy of the same sun appearing in different vessels of water as so many reflections. The present verse gives another example.

विवस्वत्प्रभातं यथारूपमक्षं
प्रगृह्णाति नाभातमेवं विवस्वान्।
यदाभात आभासयत्यक्षमेकः
स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥८

8. Just as the eye sees clearly only objects that are illumined by the sun, but not what is not so illumined, the sun itself is able to make the eye capable of seeing objects only because it is itself illumined by the Self.

The sun illumines all objects and makes them visible to us. But the sun itself derives its power to illumine objects only from Brahman. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says (3.7.9):-- "He who dwells in the sun, and is within it, whom the sun does not know, whose body is the sun and who controls the sun from within, is the Internal Ruler (Antaryami), your own (the questioner's own) immortal self". There are similar statements in this section of this Upanishad about the earth, water, fire, sky, air, heaven, etc. The purport of these statements is that everything in this universe is pervaded and controlled by Brahman as the inner Ruler. The sun, earth, water, etc., are what they are only because of Brahman, the substratum of all. Sri Sankara says in his commentary on this section of this Upanishad:--"The body and organs of the presiding deity of the earth are regularly made to function or refrain from functioning by the mere presence of the Lord (Isvara or Antaryami, Inner Controller) as witness. Such an Isvara, called Narayana, who controls the deity of the earth, directs her from within, is the Internal Controller, who is the self of all". The same remarks apply to water, fire, sun, etc. By the word 'sun' what is meant here is not the mere ball of fire which is visible to us, but its presiding deity. The inner self of the deity of the sun is the same as the inner self of all beings, namely, Brahman, as the following statement in the Taittiriya Upanishad (II.8.14) shows:-- "This one who is in man and that one who is in the sun, He is one (Brahman)". The Taittiriya Upanishad describes how everything in the universe is controlled by Brahman as the Inner Controller (II.8.1):-- "From fear of Him the wind blows, from fear of Him the sun rises, from fear of Him Agni and Indra (perform their functions) and the god of Death runs (doing his duty)".

यथा सूर्य एकोऽप्स्वनेकश्चलासु

स्थिरास्वप्यनन्वग्विभाव्यस्वरूपः।

चलासु प्रभिन्नासु धीष्वेवमेकः

स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥९

9. The one sun appears as many reflections in different containers of water, moving or still, but the sun remains

unaffected by the nature of the water in which it is reflected. Similarly, the one Self, though reflected in different intellects that are ever-changing, remains changeless and untainted by the character of the intellects.

The Self (or Brahman) reflected in the intellect is the Jiva, or individual soul. The intellects vary in nature, but Brahman is ever the same and is not in the least affected by the characteristics of the intellects. The Jiva, through ignorance, identifies himself with the body-mind complex and attributes to himself the joys and sorrows of the body-mind complex. When the Jiva gives up his identification with the body-mind complex he realizes that he is Brahman.

घनच्छन्नदृष्टिर्घनच्छन्नमर्कं

यथा निष्प्रभं मन्यते चातिमूढः।

तथा बद्धवद्भ्राति यो मूढदृष्टेः

स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥१०

10. Just as a very ignorant person whose vision is obstructed by a cloud thinks that the sun, covered by a cloud, is devoid of brilliance, so also, to a person who is deluded by Avidya the Atma appears as bound. That Atma which is of the nature of eternal consciousness I am.

Due to Avidya, ignorance of one's real nature, a person identifies himself with the body-mind complex and looks upon himself as a limited being, in bondage. Even when a person thinks of himself as bound and suffering, he is really the ever-blissful Brahman. It is not as if he is initially in bondage and becomes liberated when he realizes that he is in fact Brahman itself. It is only the ignorance of one's real nature that has to be removed. When what appears to be a snake is realized to be only a rope, it is not as if the snake has gone away and a rope has come in its place. It was only the rope that was always there, but was wrongly seen as a snake. So also, it is not as if there was really bondage earlier, and liberation was attained on the dawn of Self-knowledge.

समस्तेषु वस्तुष्वनुस्यूतमेकं

समस्तानि वस्तूनि यं न स्पृशन्ति।

वियद्वत्सदा शुद्धमच्छस्वरूपः

स नित्योपलब्धिस्वरूपोऽहमात्मा॥११

11. The one Self which pervades everything in this universe, but which nothing can taint, which is always pure like space, which is free from the impurity in the form of attachment and aversion, which is immortal, that Self of the nature of eternal consciousness, I am.

Space pervades all objects, but is never tainted by the impurities in those objects. So also the Self is never tainted by the defects such as attachment, aversion, anger, greed, etc., in the minds of living beings which the Self pervades. It is always absolutely pure, changeless and immortal.

उपाधौ यथा भेदता सन्मणीनां

तथा भेदता बुद्धिभेदेषु तेऽपि।

यथा चन्द्रिकाणां जले चञ्चलत्वं

तथा चञ्चलत्वं तवापीह विष्णो॥१२

12. O All-pervading Lord! Just as a crystal looks different due to different limiting adjuncts, you also appear to be different because of being reflected in different intellects. Just as the reflections of the moon in different vessels of water also move in accordance with the movement of the water, you also appear to undergo change because of association with different intellects.

A crystal appears red when it is in the proximity of a red piece of cloth, green when in contact with a green piece of cloth and so on. By itself it is colourless, but takes on the colour of the substance with which it is in contact. A substance which imparts its quality to another thing in contact with it is called an 'upadhi'.

This upadhi is what is known as the limiting adjunct. The crystal which is colourless takes on different colours according to the limiting adjunct. Similarly, Brahman or the Self which is changeless, appears to take on the attributes of the intellect (or mind) in which it is reflected. The reflection of Brahman in the intellect is the Jiva or individual soul. The Jivas, as such, appear to be different from one another, but this difference is

due only to the intellect which is the upadhi or limiting adjunct. In essence, every Jiva is Brahman who is changeless.
